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OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE
REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR
CONSULTATIONS WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
First session
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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Chamber of Commerce, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement to the Open-Ended Working Group under item 3 of its agenda.

2. The ICC is an international non-governmental organization which has enjoyed category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1946. It was the first NGO to be admitted to that official relationship with the United Nations. The ICC feels that this relationship has been a mutually beneficial one - one which it values highly and is working to enhance and strengthen, in response to recent expressions of interest by both Governments and the Secretary-General of the United Nations in a greater contribution by NGOs to the work of the Organization.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

3. The emergence of such issues as sustainable development and job creation on the agendas of high-level United Nations meetings and the accompanying calls for the business community actively to cooperate in dealing with them has underscored the role of the ICC as an interlocutor between business and industry and the United Nations.

4. To the extent that the decision taken by the Economic and Social Council to undertake, through the Open-Ended Working Group, a general review of the arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations set out in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) is based on a desire to develop deeper and more meaningful links with the NGO community, the ICC welcomes the exercise. In this regard, it would like to reaffirm its view, expressed on previous occasions that the United Nations should be open to truly representative non-governmental organizations as broadly as feasible.

5. The ICC recognizes that the circumstances in which Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) was adopted have changed and that Governments may wish to consider whether certain modifications should be made. As suggested above, the ICC feels that the review should basically look to expanding the substantive involvement of the non-governmental sector in the activities of the United Nations. More specifically, the process should have as a principal outcome the confirmation of the participatory rights and privileges of NGOs admitted to consultative status which are set forth in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) rather than their curtailment. For the ICC, the core of such rights and privileges is the appropriate opportunity formally to bring to the attention of delegates the views of its constituents on matters under consideration in the Council or any of its subsidiary bodies. At the same time, the ICC recognizes that it is incumbent upon it to ensure that its constituents are fully informed of the objectives of the United Nations in fields where the cooperation of business and industry may be important.

6. The ICC believes that the basic rules embodied in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) still have validity and should not be done away with. In particular, if the United Nations and the non-governmental community are to derive maximum benefit from the consultative process, the very real distinction between NGOs that are truly global in scope, representing important constituencies with broad concerns whose support of a range of Untied Nations objectives can make an essential contribution to their achievement, and those with only a limited membership and a narrow focus of interest should be retained.

7. In this connection, the ICC feels that to describe NGOs as southern or northern on the basis of the location of their headquarters and whether they maintain permanent representation at United Nations Headquarters is misleading and does not reflect the actual situation. The ICC, for example, has from time to time been referred to as a "northern" NGO. In fact, it is a genuinely global organization with members in 137 countries, North and South, industrialized and developing and in transition to a market economy. This world-wide representation of the private sector is reflected in the composition of the ICC governing body - its Council - where 33 of the 58 members are from countries that are members of the Group of 77. And the Presidency of the ICC rotates

among countries of both the North and South. Its current President is a well-known Indian businessman.

8. The question of accreditation of NGOs to United Nations conferences is closely related to the management of continuing consultative arrangements because of the tendency towards "spillover" from the former into the regular meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council. The ICC appreciates the practice under which participation in United Nations conferences, including anv preparatory activities, is normally open to relevant NGOs already in consultative status. It would hope that the rules for such participation could be similar to those governing the consultative process in the Council. The ICC believes that participation in United Nations conferences should also be open to NGOs not in consultative status but whose relevance and legitimacy have been established under procedures that are orderly, transparent and consistent. It would, of course, be open to any such organization wishing to do so also to move to acquire "permanent" consultative status with the Council through whatever separate set of procedures govern that process.

9. The ICC looks forward to the Working Group building on the positive aspects of existing arrangements and past experience so as to open new avenues of NGO cooperation in the work of the United Nations. It wishes to be as helpful as possible in this endeavour.